

# News

# Release

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## **Durbin Announces Federal Funds for Watershed Assistance and Flood Protection**

Senator Dick Durbin was instrumental in securing federal funds and assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that will assist residents in Cook County. Through NRCS, a total of nearly \$4.8 million in USDA funds will be directed at watershed and flood protection efforts in the Little Calumet River and the Lower Des Plaines Tributaries watersheds. Funds will be given to project sponsors--the Village of Wheeling and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRDGC)--before September 30, 2002.

"Both USDA and NRCS work to address watershed and flooding issues that impact rural and urban communities," explains Durbin. NRCS has provided leadership and funding for hundreds of projects throughout Illinois. Projects of this size require many partners, local sponsors, planners, hydrologic and engineering designs in order to be completed. The process can take many years. "All three projects have been in progress and been successful, but each has experienced delays and added expenses. I re-emphasized to USDA officials in Washington the importance of keeping these projects in motion and was able to ensure NRCS was able to deliver funds that the Senate Appropriations Committee had identified," explains Durbin.

NRCS Illinois State Conservationist Bill Gradle confirms that there are a number of important and crucial watershed projects across Illinois that will tremendously reduce flood damage to homes and businesses. "Every year projects just like these are included in Illinois' federal budget request and the level of funding needed to put them on the ground is identified," explains Gradle. Many similar projects remain on a national

list of plans that are backlogged due to insufficient federal watershed funds. When this occurs, projects lay in wait, and often costs increase. “We are glad to have the support of Senator Durbin who confirmed USDA’s original commitment to these flood control initiatives and allowed NRCS to support the projects, the sponsors, and the people these projects protect,” added Gradle.

Using fiscal year 2002 funds, NRCS will direct funds to three Cook County projects:

**Little Calumet River Watershed.** This watershed region is home to the *George M. O’Brian flood control reservoir*, located in Thornton Quarry, the world’s largest rock quarry. The reservoir, which provides storage of floodwaters for the communities of South Holland and Thornton, includes more than one mile of tunnel construction, a drop shaft, a diversion structure, and holds more than 3.26 billion gallons of water for flood control. Sponsor for this project is the MWRDGC. To date, NRCS has provided nearly \$2.6 million for design services. NRCS will provide an additional \$300,000 for design and \$3.6 million for construction expenses in federal funds by September 30<sup>th</sup>. Total estimated cost of this project is \$49 million.

NRCS will allocate federal funds for two projects in the **Lower Des Plaines Tributaries Watershed:** This watershed region includes the *William Rogers Memorial Diversion Channel*, also known as the Buffalo-Wheeling Diversion Channel in the Village of Wheeling, IL. This project consists of a 7,600-foot long earthen channel designed to discharge floodwaters from the Wheeling drainage ditch into the Des Plaines River. This \$2.3 million project is essentially complete, but NRCS will provide the Village (project sponsor) an additional \$100,000 needed to finalize it.

Also in the Lower Des Plaines Tributaries Watershed is the *Willow-Higgins Reservoir, known as the O’Hare Reservoir*. This a floodwater control project designed to hold nearly 424 million gallons of water. Project sponsors are MWRDGC and the City of Chicago. NRCS estimates the total cost for this reservoir at \$27.5 million. NRCS will offer \$838,086 in FY ‘02 federal funds to cover partial design costs.

“I’d like to thank USDA and especially NRCS Illinois State Conservationist Bill Gradle, for helping us keep these projects up and running,” added Durbin. “Flood protection in Cook County, and across Illinois, is a serious concern and these projects will make a difference.” Senator Durbin serves on the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. “I was glad to be able to direct these funds to worthy projects in the State of Illinois,” added Durbin.